



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
2012 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Request for Proposals
Competitive Grant Application

TODD STAPLES, COMMISSIONER

Statement of Purpose. Pursuant to the Texas Agriculture Code, Sections 12.002, and 12.007, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) hereby requests proposals for reimbursable projects designed to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funds will be made available to Texas from the Federal 2012 fiscal year budget. Although the United States Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA-AMS) has not officially released SCBGP funds to the states, TDA anticipates approximately \$1.7 million will be available for Texas projects. Notice of funds and solicitation of proposals will be published each year in the Texas Register. Funding from the USDA-AMS under the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill), which amended the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) and authorized the USDA to provide grants to States for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

Eligibility. Responses will be accepted from other agencies, universities, institutions, and producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with specialty crops.

- Projects must demonstrate that they enhance the competitiveness of Texas' specialty crop industry.
- Project funds may only be used for activities benefiting specialty crops.
- Projects must benefit more than one individual, institution or organization. Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that directly benefit or provide a profit to a single organization, institution or individual.

Funding Areas and Priorities. Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts and nursery crops (including floriculture). Refer to the following website for a list of common specialty crops (www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp).

TDA encourages organizations to develop projects to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops pertaining to the following five (5) key areas affecting the specialty crop industry. Applicants are responsible for selecting the key area their project best fits. Projects will be evaluated and ranked with all project within each key area.

I. Food Safety

TDA will consider projects that assist production specialty crop agricultural operations in continuing to supply the safest food supply in the world.

Project examples could include, but are not limited to:

- § Assisting entities in the specialty crop distribution chain in developing “Good Agricultural Practices”, “Good Handling Practices”, “Good Manufacturing Practices” .
- § Researching new methods to improve food safety.
- § Marketing or Outreach to specialty crop producers/distributors of new or upcoming Food Safety Requirements.

II. Nutrition

TDA will consider projects that improve access and consumption of specialty crops. Ensuring access to healthy foods in underserved low-income areas of Texas is a key strategy to improve public health. Increasing Texan’s access to and consumption of fruits, vegetables and tree nuts is a key strategy to improve human health.

TDA will consider projects that integrate human health and nutrition with specialty crops.

- **Food Security**

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Increase participation in under-utilized federal nutrition assistance programs
- § Develop community and school gardens, urban farms, and other innovative projects that support local and regional food systems
- § Improve access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in ways that foster self-reliance, enhance dignity and assure environmental sustainability

- **Healthy Eating**

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Increase consumption of specialty crops among all populations
- § Develop farm-to-fork networks that include schools, worksites, retail and restaurant outlets to connect local agriculture with nearby communities
- § Promote and/or demonstrate the health benefits of Texas specialty crops

III. Plant Health

TDA will consider proposals that address pests and diseases that affect the production of Texas’ specialty crops. This includes research related to the probability and impact of invasive pest, disease and weed threats to specialty crops and research to develop tools to detect, eradicate and control pests and disease.

TDA will also consider projects that enhance the conservation or improve the quality of agricultural land, water, habitat and biodiversity as well as proposals that address agriculture’s specialty crop contribution to adaptation and/or mitigation of climate change.

- **Plant Health and Pest Challenges**

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Enhance the speed and reliability of detection
- § Develop new tools for eradication
- § Develop plants resistant to pests and disease
- § Organic and Sustainable Practices

- Environmental Concerns and Conservation

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Address water use efficiency in regards to current drought conditions and for climate change adaptation
- § Assist growers to adapt to climate change by conducting research and implementation of strategies where technologies are already available - especially water use efficiency and invasive pest detection, control and management
- § Accelerate Best Management Practices (BMP) implementation for water conservation and efficiency, including development of a BMP manual for specific specialty crops

IV. Value Added Projects and Industry Development

The Specialty Crop Industry is at its prime for adding value and developing new methods and ideas for increasing the competitiveness of all specialty crops. TDA will consider projects that add to the value of specialty crops, or develop new ideas, tools or information that increase the benefit to the industry.

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Support for development of value added processing facilities
- § Strengthen specialty crop agricultural career technical education through establishment of certification programs for critical job training
- § Improvement of distribution methods by domestically and internationally
- § Industry feasibility or development of a new industry
- § Market research of consumer preference
- § Research on a new tool to improve marketability
- § New and Improved specialty crop variety/use, technology advancements and growing season extensions all include efforts to diversify and strengthen specialty crop production

V. Marketing

TDA will consider projects that improve the public/consumers' knowledge and understanding of specialty crop agriculture through education and outreach. Additionally, TDA will consider projects that increase or develop long-term sales, consumption and competitiveness of specialty crop products, including international marketing and trade activities.

- Agriculture Education/Outreach

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Promote Texas specialty crops and strengthen the connection between specialty crops and agriculture
- § Extend science-based information to specialty crop growers and other key stakeholders
- § Educate consumers about Texas' specialty crops and agriculture
- § Reconnect communities with specialty crops production
- § Educate the public about the identity and threat of invasive species to Texas specialty crops

§ Promote/Market specialty crop certification and/or education program opportunities that further enhance critical job skills

- **Market Enhancement and Promotion**

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Statewide market promotion and awareness of specialty crops
- § Specialty crop marketing concepts that target the unique characteristics of local and regional areas such as culture, geography, history, and types of agricultural production
- § Cooperative marketing and promotions such as cross-menu promotions of specialty crops
- § Agritourism as it relates to specialty crop
- § Innovative consumer/trade promotions in foreign markets

Funding Parameters.

- Selected projects will receive funding on a cost reimbursement basis. Funds will not be advanced to grantees. Selected applicants must have the financial capacity to pay all costs up-front.
- Projects will be funded at varying levels depending on the nature of the project.
- Projects must demonstrate strong justification for the requested budget as well as the potential for providing significant demonstrable benefits to Texas specialty crops.

TDA reserves the right to fund proposals partially or fully. Where more than one (1) proposal on an eligible research topic is acceptable for funding, TDA may request cooperation between grantees or revision/adjustment to a proposal in order to avoid duplication and to realize the maximum benefit to the state.

TDA may choose to use a portion of the funds for projects conducted internally, such as some specialty crop marketing campaigns, promotions, surveys, or cost-share arrangements.

Term of Funding or Duration of Projects.

- Selected projects will be funded for one (1) year, from October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013 .
- Proposals may be resubmitted in subsequent years to be considered for continued/additional funding.

Proposal Requirements. Each proposal narrative may not exceed six (6) pages (not including supporting documents). The acceptable font size is 12 point, and all margins must be 1 inch. Application Form ER-121, blank Project Narrative form and Guidance documents can be downloaded from the TDA website under the Grants and Funding tab at www.texasagriculture.gov.

A complete, hard copy application with signature must be mailed and **postmarked by Thursday February 23, 2012**. The Project Narrative must be submitted by email in a Microsoft Word document.

If a proposal meets more than one focus area, a project proposal will need to be submitted for each activity. Proposals must include all of the following information:

1. **Application Form ER-121**
2. **Project Narrative** – Must contain the following information. *Please refer to application instruction and guidance document on TDA's website, www.texasagriculture.gov, for appropriate format.*
 - a. Project Title
 - b. Partner Organization –list names of organizations working on the project
 - c. Abstract
 - d. Project Purpose
 - e. Potential Impact
 - f. Expected Measurable Outcomes
 - g. Project Oversight
 - h. Project Commitment
 - i. Work Plan - include all activities needed to complete the project, along with specific timeframes in which each activity will be started and complete. Timelines should not exceed one (1) year, October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013
 - j. Long term plans - please provide 2-3 sentences about the long-term goals of your organization or this project with regards to specialty crop and the benefit to the industry after project is complete
 - k. Budget Narrative – applicant may use form ER-121A Budget Summary as a tool to help develop the budget narrative
3. **Letter of Industry Support** – Letters of Commitment and/or Support must be submitted with the application. The letters may be submitted as separate attachments in an Adobe PDF format.

Evaluation and Selection Information.

TDA will conduct at least three levels of review during the Proposal evaluation process:

- 1) An administrative review to determine whether the applicant was responsive to the requirements of this Request for Proposals.
- 2) A panel of subject matter experts, in each key focus area, selected by the Commissioner of the Texas Department of Agriculture shall provide a technical review to evaluate the merits of each Proposal using the criteria set forth in the [Proposal Evaluation Sheet](#).
 - *Please note: Projects will be evaluated in a single key focus area selected by the applicant.*
- 3) TDA's Commissioner of Agriculture, along with an internal review panel will discuss ranking, specialty crop impact and priorities to determine projects to be included in TDA's State Plan (see Award Information and Notification).

Note: Proposals that show collaborative efforts between Specialty Crop commodities may be scored higher.

Award Information and Notification. TDA will select projects to be included in the State Plan submitted to USDA - Agricultural Marketing Service for funding. Selected projects will likely be asked to provide more detailed information regarding the scope of work, measurable outcomes,

implementation, or anticipated expenditures. Projects will begin only after USDA has made their official award notice.

TDA reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals submitted. TDA is under no legal or other obligation to execute a grant on the basis of a response submitted to this RFP. TDA shall not pay for any costs incurred by any entity in responding to this RFP.

The public announcements and written notifications will be made to all applicants and their affiliated agencies, organizations, or institutions. Favorable decisions will indicate the amount of award, duration of the grant, and any special conditions associated with the project.

Budget Information. Specialty Crop projects are paid on a cost reimbursement basis.

1. **Eligible Expenses.** Generally, expenses that are necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient performance and administration of a project are eligible. Expenses must be properly documented with sufficient backup detail, including copies of invoices. Examples of eligible expenditures are:
 - a. Personnel costs – both salary and benefits;
 - b. Travel – domestic;
 - c. Travel – foreign. Foreign travel may be paid on a case-by-case basis. To be eligible for reimbursement, foreign travel must be approved in writing and in advance by TDA;
 - d. Materials and direct operating expenses – supplies and equipment that costs less than \$5,000 per unit;
 - e. Equipment – nonexpendable, tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one (1) year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more. Allowable equipment must be only special purpose equipment (equipment which is only used for research, scientific, or other technical activities, and must solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops and the benefit the specialty crop industry);
 - f. Other expenses – any expenses that do not fall into the above categories;
 - g. Contracts – agreements made with other universities or private parties to perform a portion of the award; and
 - h. Indirect expenses – TDA limits reimbursable indirect expenses to 10% of the grant award. In order to be reimbursed for indirect costs, Grantee may be required to provide an Indirect Cost Plan to TDA for approval. Indirect costs for the specialty crop block grants are limited by the federal awarding agency. Allowable rates are currently under review by Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and are subject to change.
2. **Ineligible Expenses.** Expenses that are prohibited by state or federal law are ineligible. Examples of these expenditures are:
 - a. Alcoholic beverages;
 - b. Entertainment;
 - c. Contributions, charitable or political;
 - d. Expenses falling outside of the contract period;

- e. Expenses for expenditures not listed in the project budget;
- f. Expenses that are not adequately documented; and
- g. Capital Expenditures for general purpose equipment.

Reporting Requirement.

Quarterly Performance Reports must be completed by the grantee and submitted to TDA by deadlines stated in the grant agreement. These reports shall be in a narrative format from one (1) to three (3) pages in length and detail the accomplishments of the project objectives.

The *Final Performance Report* is due sixty (60) days after the expiration or termination of the Grant Agreement, whichever occurs first.

General Compliance Information. General compliance information may found on Application Form ER-121 on TDA's Specialty Crop Block website, www.TexasAgriculture.gov.

Deadline for Submission of Responses.

A complete, hard copy application with signature must be mailed and **postmarked by Thursday, February 23, 2012**. *See mailing information below.*

The applicant is also required to submit the Project Narrative by email in a Microsoft Word document. PDF documents will not be accepted. Electronic versions may be emailed to Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov.

Complete applications with signature must be submitted to:

Physical Address:

Ms. Mindy Fryer, Grants Specialist
Texas Department of Agriculture
1700 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

Mailing Address:

Ms. Mindy Fryer, Grants Specialist
Texas Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 12847
Austin, Texas 78711

TDA will send an acknowledgement receipt by email indicating the response was received.

Assistance and Questions.

For questions regarding submission of the proposal and TDA documentation requirements, please contact Ms. Mindy Weth Fryer, Grants Specialist, at (512) 463-6908 or by email at grants@TexasAgriculture.gov.

For questions regarding project topics or cooperative projects with TDA, please contact Mr. Richard De Los Santos, Coordinator for Horticultural, Produce and Forestry, at (512) 463-7472 or by email at Richard.DeLosSantos@TexasAgriculture.gov.